LODI HISTORICAL SOCIETY
Incorporated October 20, 1988

LODI HISTORIAN

VOLUME 10, NUMBER 1 SPRING 1999

WOOCK BROS. – SUPERIOR MFG. CO. ATLAS IRON WORKS – SUPER MOLD

By Lucy Reller & Ralph Lea

▲ *1932-1933, Superior & Super Mold on Sacramento Street.*
S.J. County Historical Society Photo

▲ *The Woock family barn assembly building & sales yard.*
Beverly & Nick Felten photo

Julius Woock was born in Germany in 1860 and at age 26 came to America. A year later in 1887 he settled in Southern California and married Elise Nickel in 1889. They had four children, Hattie, Walter, Herbert and Eric. The family moved to Lodi in 1904 and located on a ranch on Kettleman Lane about a mile south of the town.

The boys attended Lodi schools and Heald's Business College. Walter and Herbert started a small shop on their father's farm with electrical wiring, engine and pump repairing for neighboring farmers until starting work for Monarch Pumps as sales agents for the Monarch Foundry of Stockton. Later Walter worked for the Marine Iron Works of Stockton, building and installing pumps. He became a part owner of Marine.

In 1914 Walter R., Herbert J. and Eric M. Woock established the Superior Manufacturing Company at Lodi, California. They invented the "Superior" pump and on August 1, 1919 they incorporated with Walter, president; Herbert, vice president; Eric, treasurer; and H.E. Looser, assistant manager. They were located at 24 North School Street and sold Mohawk tires, Richmond Extinguishers and their own

▲ *1914: Centrifugal water pumps were ideal for lifts of less than 20 feet, the Woock Bros. and crew.*
Beverly & Nick Felten Photo

inventions, the Elbow Irrigation Check Valve, as well as pumps and pumping machinery.

In 1920 H.T. Bailey was listed as company secretary. A modern 206' x 139' brick and steel factory building was erected. It was located at 420 North Sacramento Street at a cost of $150,000. Two years later the 80' x 50' gray iron and brass foundry building was added.

In the back yard of the Hill House Museum a 16" x 20" plaque is set in concrete. It was donated by Nick and Beverly Felten, she is the daughter of Eric M. Woock. It reads:

This Is The First Cast Iron Poured
From a Cupola In The City of Lodi, California
March 22, 1922
Superior Mfg. Co., Inc.

The company is building centrifugal pumps in sizes from 1-1/2" to 12" designed to discharge from 60 to 4500 gallons per minute. The company has agencies in Kern, Kings, San Joaquin, Tulare, Madera, Sacramento and Placer Counties.

January 1, 1923 the company name was changed to The Superior Iron Works with H.J. Woock, president; Otto Spenker, vice president; E.M. Woock, secretary-treasurer; and Walter Woock in charge of the mining division of pumps and pumping machinery.

In April 1924, the largest creditor, H.C. Beckman purchased the entire factory for approximately $80,000.00. The Woock brothers were too busy inventing new machinery to pay attention to profit and loss.

In July the name was again changed to The Atlas Iron Works with an increase of investors and directors. Sales were slow and the company economy was dismal. The capital was all in buildings and supplies.

H.J. Woock was still manager; Glynn, shop foreman; George O. Beckman, head salesman; and Joseph C. Beckman was added as a salesman.

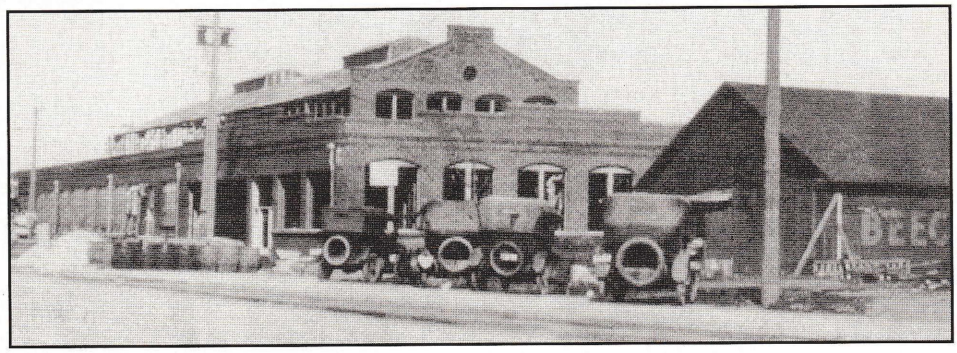
The water table was dropping and the company was selling The Superior deep well turbine as well as centrifugal pumps. Automatic pressure systems were also sold. The company employed up to 50 men during the busy season.

The start of another company that had a great effect on Lodi was about to happen. A process for adding rubber to a tire that was ready to be discarded and give it new life.

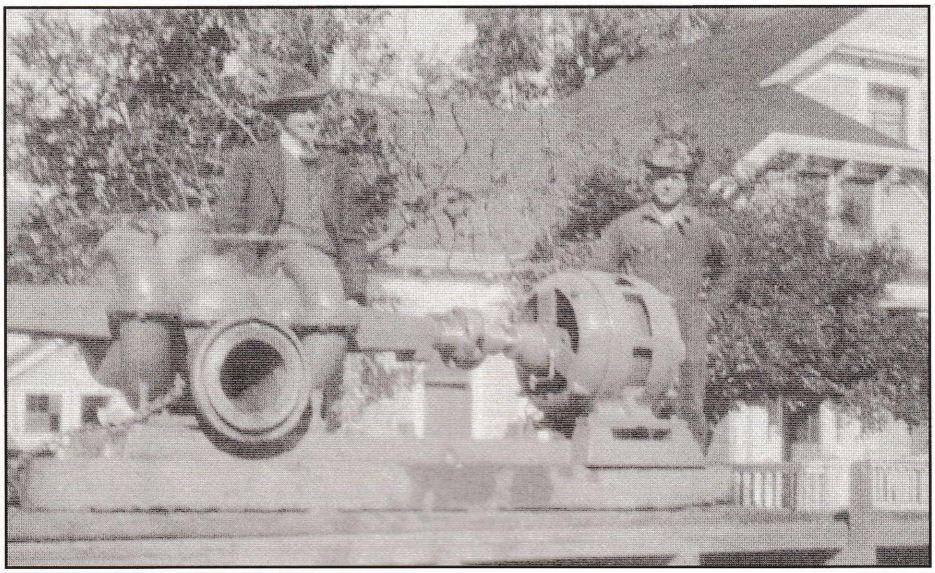
November 1926 the first full circle mold retread was produced.

Some time earlier than the above date, H.L. Smith, one of the inventors of the mold was in Lodi on a Sunday afternoon talking to the manager of the local Western Union office. He stated that he and the other two inventors were looking for a manufacturer who could produce a retreading tire mold

▲ *1920 New plant at 420 North Sacramento Street.* *Beverly & Nick Felten photo*



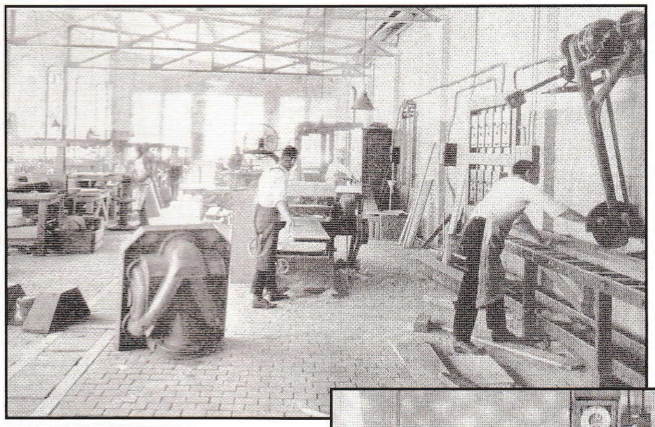
▲ *Superior Iron Works on Sacramento Street, just completed in 1920.*



▲ *Walter & Herb Woock with a Superior Pump (twin).* *Beverly & Nick Felten photo*

for them. Jack Caulfield and Charlie Peterson from Sacramento were the other inventors. Caulfield was a carpenter and Peterson a building contractor.

C.L. Maguire suggested Atlas Iron Works of Lodi, local manufacturers of centrifugal water pumps. H.L. Smith stayed overnight to talk with H.C. Beckman, sole owner of the firm. Arrangements were made whereby Atlas undertook to build the mold on a job basis.



▲ *View of the pattern shop of Superior Iron Works in the 1920's.* *Beverly & Nick Felten photo*

G.O. Beckman, salesman for Atlas recalled that Atlas Iron Works made several molds before one was developed that worked satisfactorily. The first attempt had an aluminum steam chamber which leaked like a sieve. More experiments followed until finally a satisfactory mold with a watch case type opening was produced identified as "Model A." It was this mold that was first tested in November 1926.

There were six men present at the first successful full circle retreading of a tire at the Service Laundry and Steam Cleaning Plant at 466 North Sacramento Street in Lodi, California. Inventors Jack Caulfield and Charlie Peterson; H.J. Woock, manager of Atlas; E.A. Glynn, shop foreman; G.O. Beckman, salesman for the Atlas Iron Works located across the street; and Fred Polensky, owner of the laundry that provided the steam for this initial retreading.

Woock and Glynn developed a second model that had better heat conduction. This new mold was installed at the Mills Tire Shop in Lodi for experimentation with adjustable sidewall pressure plates.

The Model C Mould was then constructed with pressure plates and the prototype was placed in the Mills Tire Shop and in May, 1927 a duplicate "mould" was delivered to George Schmid in Sacramento.

On June 11, 1927 H.C. Beckman sold The Atlas Company to the men who were operating the plant after the Iron Works had agreed three months earlier to manufacture full circle tire retreading machines for The Superior Manufacturing Company, owned by the three inventors of the mold.

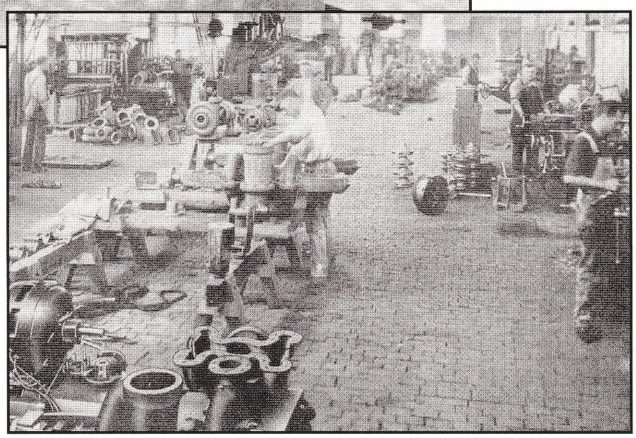
The price agreed to was $300.00 per machine and M.C. Biggerstaff had exclusive rights to market and sell all full circle tire retreaders. All the machines used before this new invention were made of three separate machines that produced a tire that was not round and was very unsatisfactory. It was called the third-circle type mould.

The first Super Mould was sold The Mills Tire Exchange of Lodi. George H. Schmid of Sacramento purchased the second mould and R.E. Smith of Stockton was next.

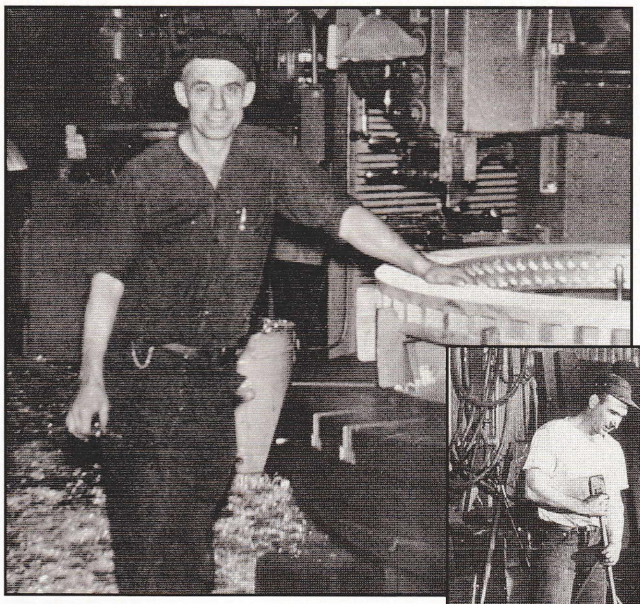
They were an instant success and by December of 1927 Super Mould and Atlas agreed to manu-

◀ *Superior Pump's Accounting Office during the 1920's.*

Beverly & Nick Felten photo



▲ *Main section of the machine shop in the 1920's Superior shop. Note the brick floor.* *Beverly & Nick Felten photo*



▲ *Super Mold, March 1954; Johnny Matts.*
S.J. County Historical Society photo

facture the next twenty moulds for $475.00 and after that at the actual cost.

This was the start of the Super Mould Company. (Note the spelling of "mold.") Thus began the partnership comprised of the three men from Atlas Iron Works of Lodi and the three Sacramento inventors.

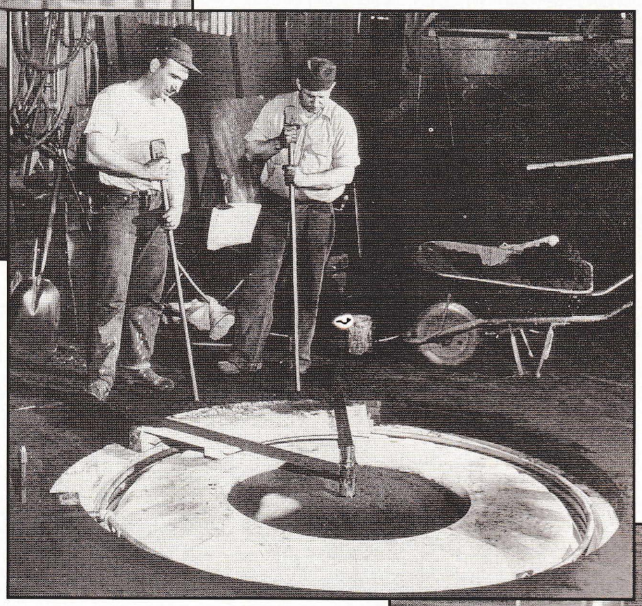
Atlas Iron Works was to make the molds, sell them to Super Mould which in turn leased them to tire dealers. It was decided to lease the molds rather than sell them in order to have more control over the finished product, the retreaded tire.

The first production of Model C, shown on Lodi's records as Mold No. 1, was leased to the Ralph Carter Company in Stockton in the latter part of 1927. It was followed in quick succession with units placed in the towns of Santa Rosa, Vallejo, Oakland, San Jose and Sacramento. Mr. Beckman leased these units on his first visit to dealers.

The mold was used for over twenty years by The Carter Tire Company retreading thousands of tires during a period that saw tire transition from high, hoop-like to low pressure, squat tires with great change in tread designs. This was accompanied by changing matrices on occasion.

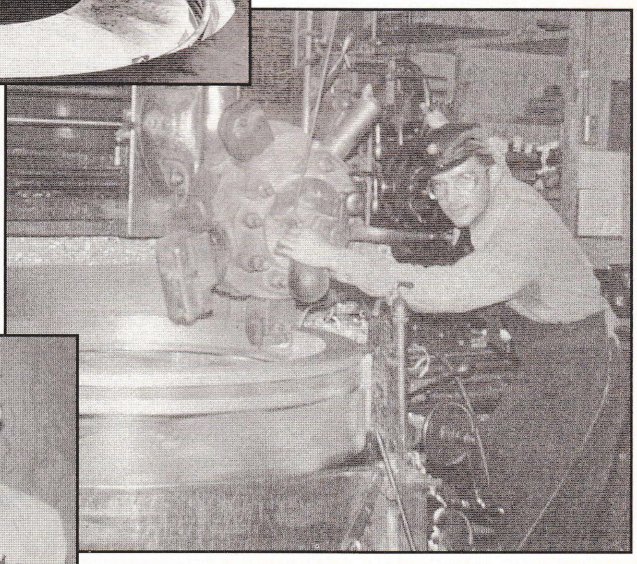
When Mr. Carter retired, Mold No. 1 was reacquired by Lodi for historical reasons.

Starting in 1928, the Model C mold was advertised to tire dealers as



▲ *Lodi Foundry Super Mold, 1950-60. Doyle Miller and Herb Rieger off the Road Matix.*
S.J. County Historical Society photo

◀ *W.B. "Pop" Thurman; Super Mold, 1930's*
S.J. County Historical Society photo



Super Mold, February 1954, C. Reiswig. ▲

▲ *Super Mold, 1950's. Top row, l-r: Unknown, John Stienert, Don Wilcox, Elton Perrin. Bottom row, l-r: Unknown, Unknown, Ed Krein, Leo Schmidt.*
S.J. County Historical Society photo

▲ *Super Mold Lodi Machine Shop, March, 1954.* *S.J. County Historical Society photo*

the Supertreader. However, most dealers referred to it as "That Lodi Mold." The name was changed to conform with this common usage, and Lodi became the registered trademark for a long line of retreading equipment.

Business was good and in order to obtain working capital to build the new molds to be leased, a third company was formed expressly to finance the molds being leased on monthly payments. This new firm was called Thur-Web Corporation and was owned by Percy Webster, the patent attorney from Stockton for Super Mold; William B. Thurman and his brother, George, both from Berkeley; William B. Thurman, president and George S. Thurman, secretary of the Fire Proof Wall Company.

In 1928 the three companies, Atlas Iron Works, Super Mould Company and the Thur-Web Corporation were consolidated into the Super Mould Corporation of Nevada. It was advantageous to incorporate in our neighboring state at that time. Production, leasing and financing were all located at one place, the building at 420 North Sacramento Street, Lodi, California.

W.B. Thurman was elected president; H.J. Woock, vice president; and G.O. Beckman, secretary and sales manager. E.A. Glynn, Percy Webster and George Thurman were named directors.

The new firm extended its operation, first in California, then in the eleven western states and by 1930 it went national as retreading prospered in the eastern states. C.C. Willis and Ray Wisner were introducing full circle retreading and Lodi Shops sprang up in Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Maryland, Delaware and Washington, D.C.

In 1932 Wayne L. Gillis was traveling 65,000 miles a year to places in Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota and parts of Canada.

Not only were recapped tires cheaper than new tires, but they had more rubber. During World War II Wayne Gillis had his tires recapped five times, traveling over a quarter of a million miles.

Lodi Super Mould next operated in the southern states and finally the midwest. John M. "Jim" Conley first and then Lou W. Darden headed the national sales and advertising for the Super Mould Company.

One of the things that aided the company was the introduction of the Model D Supertreader in 1929, which added the field of truck tire retreading. During the National Independent Tire Dealers Convention in Chicago, W.B. Thurman had the Model D operating for all visitors to see.

▲ *Super Mold Stockton Foundry. Herb Rieger casting fly wheels; finished on the left, just cast on the right.*

▲ *Woock Bros. twin pump on display at the fair. (That's not really Charlie Chaplin.)* *Beverly & Nick Felten photo*

▲ *January 21, 1965: The molds are getting larger. Super Mold; Julius Meier in back row, fifth from left.* *S.J. County Historical Society photo*

It was six years later when Lodi had a complete line of equipment for most passenger and truck tires and a year later, in 1936, Model R was ready and included tractor tires.

The same year a new corporation was formed. The SuperMold Corporation of California, which eliminated the Nevada Company. The company now went public and offered 40,000 common shares at $11.00 per share.

Sales of molds peaked in 1934 at $730,000. Sales were $539,000. in 1935 and down to $350,000. in 1936. These changed in 1940 when the popular F-1 Mold was introduced and sold throughout the world. Over 12,000 of these went into use followed by new molds for smaller trucks and cars with 12- and 13-inch diameters.

After 14 years of growth, annual sales volume reached 7,000,000 tires from 4,500 shops at the time of Pearl Harbor and over a million dollars in sales.

The war years had heavy demand on retreading production. There were restrictions on metal used and the United States had turned to synthetic rubber. The army was a major purchaser of Lodi equipment during the war, setting up large plants in England and later on the European continent.

Scarce retreading equipment was operated around the clock in many plants with some women on the job.

The civilian motorists had to make do with tires of reclaimed rubber which proved to be an inferior product and gave the industry a set back after the war with a shortage of retreadable casings.

In 1944 the payroll timekeeper was making $33.00 a week.

In 1946 an office clerk was making $35.00 a week.

Before the days of vending machines some of the office ladies made coffee and sold pastries to the male employees between 8:30 and 9:00 a.m. in the ladies lounge. The State Health Inspector took a dim view of this free enterprise event. Elma Heinrich and Gladys Fachner may have been involved.

It was April of 1947 before the Lodi plant could again offer immediate delivery to increase Super Mold's production of iron and steel casings. The Lodi firm purchased The Monarch Foundry in Stockton. This was the same plant where the Woock brothers started their careers thirty years earlier. The first aluminum mold was poured in 1952.

Improvements in the Lodi retreading equipment took place all during the 1950's. Sales had topped ten million dollars by 1957 with 10% exported into more than 80 countries.

Hugh Kiedrowski and Howard Frantz were active in marketing and customer service in the Lodi office. C.R. "Cap" Lohr and his brother Homer moved up from stockroom clerk jobs to managers of sales and traffic. In 1959 there were many top management changes. Clay H. Sorrick replaced W.B. Thurman. The remaining nucleus of original management, G.O. Beckman and E.A. Glynn retired, Alan Waddell was named executive vice president, and A.A. Pederson along with Bruce Alexander were named directors.

▲ *A total of $1,070.00 in addition to merchandise awards were given out to Suggestion Award winners. Top row, l-r: Floyd Grammer, Luther Williams, Dagobert Schmidt, Emil Knapp, Oscar Lammle, Edward Berg, Walter Schuler, Charles Reid, Maurice Berg, and Gustav Bontscho. Bottom row, l-r: Ben Herrera, John Underhill, Ray McKindley, Elton Perrin, Ray Nehlich, Lee Franklin, Hap Shavoley, Lenard Daetweiler, Al Dal Porto, and Frank Garfolo.*
S.J. County Historical Society photo

▲ *1970; Super Mold Lodi Division Staff. Top row, l-r: Len Fischer, Herman Foecelle, Harold Smith, and Ben Ehrhardt. Bottom row, l-r: Fred Nessler, Jerry Mandeson, Norbert Hyskie, Dick Papon, and John Masterson.*
S.J. County Historical Society photo

◀ *Super Mold Sales Meeting. Starting at left: Unknown, Bruce Alexander, Carl Moore, Alma Heinrich, Hugh Ridrowskit, Lew Fike, Norb Hyske, and at far right, John Watson.*
S.J. County Historical Society photo

On November 1, 1960 Alan Waddel succeeds long-time president of Super Mold, G.O. Beckman.

The change resulted in a major change of policy for the company. The replacement of older employees had an undesirable effect on moral.

A year later Super Mold formed the Magna Service Corp. to handle the leasing and financing of equipment. Norbert Hyske was named vice president and general manager.

By 1962 The Trutread Tire Molds of Los Angeles had moved to Lodi. They used large equipment for retreading earthmovers and off the road tires, and trucks that were used in mines and for heavy construction using enormous tires that hauled heavy loads.

Super Mold, Lodi. Top row, l-r: Jim Bellany, John James, Ed Wagner, Tony Jackovich, and Floyd Gramer. Bottom row, l-r: Nap Chavaloy, Maynard Rauser, Susan Lind Veit, switchboard operator, and Stanley Bender. ▶
S.J. County Historical Society photo

▲ *Superior Manufacturing Company on North Sacramento Street, 1923.*

Lou Fike and Floyd Walpole headed the new engineering department.

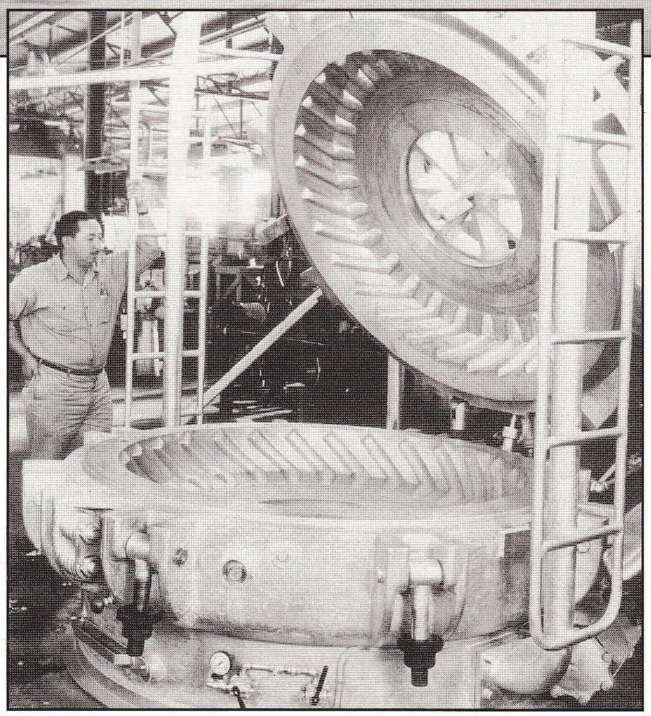
At this time Super Mold had over 500 employees at its Lodi, Stockton and Akron locations. With its world-wide sales and service more than half of all the tires were being retreaded in Lodi molds and presses.

In October of 1966 Super Mold purchased 40 acres of the W.G. Micke estate for $205,000. to construct a 2.5 million dollar facility. Ground breaking of the new plant took place within a year and the net sales of Super Mold reached $11.7 million.

The company moved their equipment into the Beckman Road plant in 1969 and a short time later major problems appeared with labor problems in the tire manufacturing company as well as the firms' west coast plants. Super Mold ended the year with a $3 million dollar loss.

In September 1972, in order to protect shareholders, the Super Mold Corporation merged with Intercole Automation, Inc. Three years later the 185-person work force in Lodi was reduced and the Lodi operation was moved to Wadsworth, Ohio. Except for the Sacramento Street site the Lodi plant was listed for sale at $1.5 million.

The September 28, 1976 auction of Lodi Intercole (Super Mold), 300 S. Beckman Road, signaled the death knell of an era in Lodi history.



▲ *Lew Dais shown with Super Mold's Model S-6 mold, 1970.*
S.J. County Historical Society photo

THE LODI HISTORIAN
is a quarterly publication of the Lodi Historical Society
P.O. Box 264, Lodi, CA 95241-0264

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